

GOVERNOR FLETCHER RECOGNIZES PASSAGE OF PRIMARY SEAT BELT, OTHER TRANSPORTATION BILLS

Bills ceremoniously signed during Kentucky Lifesavers Conference

FRANKFORT, Ky. – In the presence of several hundred people – including many state legislators and highway safety advocates – Governor Ernie Fletcher ceremoniously signed primary seat belt legislation today during the Kentucky Lifesavers Conference at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Louisville.

“I want to congratulate the members of the 2006 Kentucky Legislature who have demonstrated the courage and leadership needed to pass this legislation,” said Governor Fletcher. “A primary seat belt law will save a number of lives every year. With that in mind, I am gratified to have the opportunity to sign this measure into law.”

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) also presented Governor Fletcher with an award for his leadership on highway safety issues during the opening session of the Kentucky’s Lifesavers Conference.

“This legislation has nothing to do with liberals and conservatives or whether you’re good or bad,” said Senator Williams. “It’s all about saving lives.”

“Members just thought it was the right thing to do,” said House Speaker Jody Richards (D-Bowling Green) following the House vote. Speaker Richards pointed out that his niece died in a car accident in 1982. She was not wearing a seat belt, Richards said.

House Bill 117 also includes a provision which requires children under the age of 16 to wear helmets when riding an all terrain vehicle. The bill also expands testing for lead and other health problems affecting children.

Recent research from the University of Kentucky’s Transportation Center and from the Kentucky Institute of Medicine revealed some startling projections concerning the impact a primary seat belt law will have on Kentucky families and the state’s economy. Some highlights include:

- At least 62 fewer fatalities per year
- 388 fewer incapacitating spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries
- 1,051 fewer non-incapacitating injuries from accidents involving passenger vehicles and light trucks.
- Kentucky’s Medicaid budget would save a minimum of \$40.9 million over 10 years, including \$2.2 million the first year and \$585,000 per year for long-term medical care.
- Kentucky would save \$324 million in comprehensive costs (lost life years and productivity).

The recently approved federal highway reauthorization bill included another incentive for a primary seat belt law. Under the federal bill, with the adoption of a primary seat belt

law, Kentucky will now get an additional \$11.2 million in federal funds to use for safety improvements on state roads.

Governor Fletcher also conducted a ceremonial signing today of House Bills 90 and 272.

House Bill 90 (HB 90) expands Kentucky's Graduated Driver's License Program (GDL). The goal of the legislation is to curb the overall number of crashes involving teenage drivers, especially the high number of deadly crashes with teen involvement.

"This law will also save lives," said Governor Fletcher. "It provides a way for us to ease young drivers onto the roadways by controlling their exposure to progressively more difficult driving situations."

The Governor also made reference to the expected impact of HB 90 on overall highway safety in Kentucky.

"This measure will produce a safer group of teen drivers, which will mean safer highways for all of us," Governor Fletcher said.

Kentucky currently has one of the highest teen crash rates in the nation. Teenage drivers account for only 6 percent of the state's driving population, yet they are involved in about 18 percent of fatal crashes in Kentucky.

Representative Tom Burch (D-Louisville) sponsored the GDL bill and made impassioned pleas for its passage throughout the legislative process. "I've lost a teenage granddaughter in an auto accident, and I can assure you that a person never gets over a loss like that," Rep. Burch said.

House Bill 272 (HB272) addresses the problems of motorist safety as well as clogged interstates and parkways following traffic accidents, and codifies incident management procedures for quick clearance. The term "quick clearance" is defined as the practice of rapidly and safely removing temporary obstructions from the roadway.

"This is a measure which will reduce congestion and improve traffic flow on our interstates and parkways" said Governor Fletcher. "Quick handling of accidents lessens the negative effect on economic activity in Kentucky."

Senator Gary Tapp (R-Waddy) sponsored identical legislation to HB272 in the Senate. Senator Tapp underlined the importance of the quick clearance bill relative to economic activity in the Commonwealth. "This is just another step in making Kentucky a business-friendly state, while protecting our citizens at the same time. I appreciate the administration's support for a really good piece of legislation."

State Representative David Osborne (R-Prospect), who co-sponsored HB272, stressed the safety aspect of this legislation.

“By making sure these accidents are quickly moved out of the way, we can prevent additional accidents which may result from traffic congestion,” said Rep. Osborne. “This bill is very important when you consider that an estimated 20 percent of all accidents nationwide are secondary crashes. We will also be reducing the risk to people standing around vehicles at the accident site/”

All of the bills covered in today’s ceremony signing (HB 117, HB90 and HB 272) will become law July 12, 2006, but will have different implementation dates.

The Kentucky Lifesavers Conference, which is underway at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Louisville, provides many sessions which deal with highway safety from the perspectives of engineering, enforcement, education and emergency response, as well as the combined cooperation of each of these groups.